

Flying Officer Richard John Watts Askwith 



**Royal Canadian Air Force
418 Squadron**

Motto: "Piyautailili"

"Defend even unto death"



Killed in Action 28 April 1942

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Background

Richard John Watts Askwith was born 3 October 1919 in Ottawa, Ontario. He was the eldest of two boys born to John and Joan Askwith. His younger brother Gordon was born in 1921. Joan Askwith died in 1936 of appendicitis.

Richard attended Lisgar Collegiate from 1933 to 1937 and while there was active in sports as a member of the ski team. Other athletic pursuits included swimming, riding, tennis, football, hockey, cricket and sailing. Following junior matriculation, he was employed as a junior clerk at Canadian General Electric.

Prior to enlistment, he had been taking a flying course at the Ottawa Flying Club. He had 1 hour and 30 minutes of flying time logged as a student pilot flying a Taylor Cub.

1938 - Munich Crisis

1 September 1939 - Hitler invades Poland.

3 September 1939 - Britain and France declare war on Germany.

10 September 1939 - Canada declares war on Germany

Enlistment and Training

It's difficult to know the exact date that he enlisted - his date of birth was filled in on the Officers Application and Record Sheet, instead of the current date. His service records show a flurry of activity in September of 1939 with letters of reference from his high school principal, church minister, manager at General Electric, and C.H. King, the Deputy Commissioner of the RCMP, which are all dated 25 to 29 September 1939. His medical exam was completed 4 October 1939. At 5'9" and 130 pounds, he is described as 16 pounds underweight but otherwise "fit for full flying duties."

The entire package including his interview from the Recruiting Centre was forwarded from the RCAF Ottawa Recruiting Centre to the Department of National Defence on 5 October 1939.

On 31 October 1939, Richard received a letter from the Air Force telling him that his application would go before a Selection Board on 5 December 1939. If he was successful, he would be notified immediately and would receive instructions regarding the Civil Flying Club that he would be attached to for Elementary Flying Training.

There is no record of a letter of acceptance in his service file, but there is a document dated 12 January 1940 entitled Appointments - Special Reserve RCAF.

“1. I am directed to advise that the undermentioned candidates have been selected to undergo Elementary Flying Training at the Civil Flying Clubs as indicated, For the course commencing 0900 hours, January 29th, 1940.

Askwith, Richard John Watts - 188 Russell Ave., Ottawa Ont.

R.H. Hyndman and R.J.W. Askwith to report to Ft. William Flying Club, Ft. William, Ont.

2. These candidates will be appointed to the Special Reserve, RCAF with the rank of Pilot Officer.”

1940 - Belgium, France and Holland fall; Churchill becomes Prime Minister; the evacuation at Dunkirk; and the British victory in the Battle of Britain causes Hitler to postpone plans for the invasion of Britain.

On 29 January 1940, Richard was attached to Lakehead Flying School in Fort William, Ontario. Flying a Tiger Moth, he was trained and tested on everything from taxiing the aircraft to forced landings. On 28 February 1940, he scored 60 percent on his 20 hour test card with room for improvement as the remarks from his Examining Officer show:

“Remarks on Forced Landings: Pupil does turn right to ground & tends to lose flying speed close to ground. Method is poor. Turns fairly accurate.

General Remarks On Test: Pupil is light & smooth on controls but exhibited numerous faults.

1. Loses air speed in gliding turns.
2. Forced landings poor - turns to ground & loses air speed.
3. Inclined to let the aircraft get away from him - just average.”

His 50 hour test card from 19 April 1940 showed improvement. He scored 75 percent.

“Remarks on Forced Landings: Forced landings above average - overcrowds - loses air speed during approach.

General Remarks On Test: OK - Light on controls and steady - excitable - Inclined to lose air speed in gliding turns & particularly if engine fails - above average recommended for S.E. (single engine).”

On 22 April 1940, Richard was taken on strength with No. 1 Initial Training School (ITS) in Toronto. He arrived just before the launch of the British Commonwealth War Training Plan on 29 April 1940 and was present for the arrival of the first class of candidates.

April 15, 1940

(Reprinted from The Maple Leaf)

by Charmion Chaplin-Thomas

A week after the German invasion of Norway and Denmark, the Phoney War is over in Europe, and the demand for aircrew, especially fighter pilots, is accelerating. Recruiting centres across Canada have thousands of potential aircrew candidates on waiting lists, and the RCAF Manning Depot in Toronto—previously the Canadian National Exhibition site—is bursting with young men in itchy blue battledress who can't wait to find out whether they have what it takes to become members of the next generation of knights of the air. Fortunately, the RCAF is well equipped to make that determination.

On Avenue Road in the suburbs of Toronto, a large complex of buildings in the "stockbroker's Tudor" style beloved of the city's moneyed elite has been transformed into an RCAF training establishment. Built in 1928 for the Eglinton Hunt Club, its features include a gymnasium, a bowling alley, a swimming pool, a ballroom, stables for 150 horses, and an indoor riding school. A fox peeks from the chimney on the east wing of the clubhouse, and hounds grace the mantel over the fireplace in the ground-floor lounge.

The foxhunters left in 1938, thanks to a brush with bankruptcy, and as of today the complex is No 1 Initial Training School. This is where RCAF recruits identified at the Manning Depot as potential pilots, observers and wireless operators will come for aircrew selection and the first stages of ground school.

The thinking behind No 1 ITS is radically different from the approach taken to aircrew selection during the Great War. Everyone knows victory in this war may well depend on air power, and with the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan the RCAF is embarking on a massive aircrew production scheme. Teaching men to fly aircraft in battle is very expensive, and the cost is reckoned in students' and instructors' blood as well as time, equipment and money, so it is critically important that only candidates with genuine potential be directed to flying schools. At No 1 ITS, the primary objective is to identify those who lack the right stuff—whatever that might be—and direct them out of the flight training system. It will be done fairly and efficiently, under scientific principles as much as possible.

The most obvious physical evidence of this new approach is the odd device installed in the Hunt Club's ballroom: a gimbal-mounted wingless fuselage with basic aircraft controls. It's a Link trainer, the world's first flight simulator, invented to teach pilots to fly on instruments. With its hood removed and a stretch of "sky" installed in front of the pilot's seat, this one has been modified for visual flight training, simulating an open aircraft such as the De Havilland Tiger Moth and Fleet Finch elementary trainers.

One reason for putting the No 1 ITS at the Eglinton Hunt Club is its proximity to the University of Toronto, where Dr. E.A. Bott heads the Department of Psychology. His profession's acknowledged leader in Canada, Dr. Bott was recruited by the RCAF in 1939 to develop psychological instruments for aircrew selection, a task that will grow enormously in scope and importance. Elsewhere in the Hunt Club complex, a secret program of aviation research is going on under the direction of Dr. Frederick Banting, another luminary of the University of Toronto and the chairman of the Associate Committee on Aviation Research, part of the National Research Council.

This is the other main reason for putting No 1 ITS here, so the constant flow of aircrew candidates and school staff can provide cover for the activities of the physiologists studying the effects of acceleration—"gee force"—on the human body.

EGLINTON HUNT SEES AIR PLAN OPENING TODAY

First of Fighting Fliers to Report for Duty as Scheme Gets in Motion

ON TIME SCHEDULE

Ottawa, April 28 (CP).—Tomorrow morning comes the zero hour for the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan.

Then the vanguard of a legion of blue-clad warriors of the air reports for duty at the initial training school operated by the Royal Canadian Air Force on the site of the Eglinton Hunt Club in Toronto.

The Canadian youths who enter that school tomorrow will be the first to start training as pilots, air gunners and air observers for the fighting air forces of the Empire, the first of a host which may run to many thousands if the second Great War continues over a period of years.

All the work done on the training plan in past months has been in the nature of preparation for the training of these men, setting up of schools, training of instructors, mechanics and all the varied types of personnel required, acquisition of equipment, including aircraft.

The opening of the Eglinton Hunt school is the start of the training of the men who will fight overseas and give to the Allied nations that overwhelming superiority in air power desired by those directing the fight against Nazi Germany.

On Rigid Time Schedule.

From that event the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan will open out like a huge fan on a rigid time schedule until more than seventy schools are operating all across Canada and perhaps 20,000 to 30,000 trained pilots, air observers and air gunners are leaving for combatant service each year. The plan reaches its maximum productivity in three years.

The number called for the first course at the Eglinton initial training school is an official secret, but it runs into the hundreds. Officials of the Defense Department have the dates for the opening of all schools and the numbers of students to be

accommodated in each worked out to the last detail.

They have careful estimates of the number from each class who will qualify for one of the three classes of flying service and the number who will fail to qualify, be discharged or assigned to some other duty.

The Eglinton school is the first of three initial training schools called for in the plan. Thus, in a sense, it is the start of the first stage of the unfolding of the project.

The men reporting there tomorrow will spend four weeks acquiring discipline and learning some of the elementary things which all air force men must know.

Tested After Four Weeks.

At the end of four weeks there will be examinations and tests. Some will be ordered to proceed to elementary flying training schools for training as pilots, some to air observers' schools and some to a wireless school to begin a course which will make them air gunners. Then another class of recruits will enter the school.

This means that about June 1 the air force will have ready enough elementary flying training schools to accommodate the pilots coming from Eglinton, enough air observer schools to accommodate the air observers and wireless schools for the air gunners.

The pilots will spend eight weeks in elementary flying training schools before moving into advanced flying training schools where they will spend eight weeks in the intermediate squadron and six in the advanced squadron with two weeks in a bombing and gunnery school sandwiched between.

Of twenty-six elementary flying training schools contemplated seven already have been located. These will be at Malton, Windsor Mills, Que.; London, Fort William, Lethbridge, Alta.; Prince Albert, Sask., and Windsor, Ont.

One service flying training school of sixteen contemplated already is operating at Camp Borden, training the instructors who, in turn, will teach the pilots chosen from the lads entering the Eglinton school. Others will be at Ottawa, Calgary, Saskatoon, Brantford, Kingston and places yet to be announced.

Air Observers Trained.

Air observers picked at the Eglinton school will receive next a twelve-weeks' course in an air observer school of which there will be ten eventually. The first one opened probably will be at Malton. Other sites for these schools are Edmonton, Regina, London and Prince Albert.

The next step for the air observers will be to the bombing and gunnery schools for six weeks. There will be ten such schools, but as they will not be required until well into the summer, only two sites have been settled, Jarvis, Ont., and Mossbank, Sask.

These schools require a sizable space of empty country, preferably with some water where bombs may be dropped on targets and machine guns fired from the air without danger.

The air observers will finish their instruction with four weeks at an air navigation school of which there will be two, neither located yet.

Wireless operating is the biggest part of the education of a gunner. From the Eglinton school the gunners will go to a wireless school for sixteen weeks and from thence to a bombing and gunner school for four weeks. Of four wireless schools planned, one now is operating in Montreal and another will operate at Winnipeg.

Handwritten notes:
#149
was
Europe
1939
Ontario
Empire

Figure 1 Extract from The Globe and Mail 29 April 1940

There is little documentation of the twenty five days Richard spent at No. 1 ITS. Having already received elementary training at Fort William, he was trained and tested at No. 1 ITS on administration, armament and signals etc.

Following Toronto, he was posted to Station Trenton for the period 17 May 1940 to 3 June 1940. The notation on his file was: "Posted Sup'y to Practice & Ferry Flight for duty" and "T.D. from Trenton to Ft. Erie by rail, 2000 29/5/40 returned by air 1800 30/5/40." Pilots would often ferry aircraft from one location to another. The Air Force would issue a train ticket for one leg of the trip, and if large numbers of aircraft were being transported the Air Force would use an aircraft to ferry the flying crew for one leg of the trip.



Figure 2 Trenton, late 1930's

Source: Quinte West Public Library

Following fourteen days leave, Richard was posted to Borden for Intermediate and Advanced Flying Training. Loaded on course number 6, Richard would be the last of the men to start training as pilot officers. Following this group all others would be under the British Commonwealth Air Training Program and would start their training as Aircraftmen. Commissions may or may not have followed.

At Borden, Richard trained on Ansons and the Link trainer. Intermediate training involved flying and ground work and he seemed to excel at ground work. Out of a possible 450 marks in flight training he received 298. The Chief Flying Instructor noted: "A student of average ability. Should improve with more instruction. Weak in forced landings. Alert and tries hard." Out of a possible 650 marks for ground training, he achieved 502.



Figure 3 Avro Anson

Source: CF Photo

The course finished on 13 August 1940. Richard placed 9th in the class of 45 and was awarded his Pilot's Flying Badge on 19 August 1940.

Wings Are Presented To 41 Pilots at Borden

(By BILL ROCHE.)

(Staff Writer, The Globe and Mail.)

Camp Borden, Sept. 6.—Climaxing the annual sports day of No. 1 Service Flying Training School, Royal Canadian Air Force, forty-one graduates of the intermediate training squadron late this afternoon received their wings from Group Captain A. T. N. Cowley, officer commanding the school.

Happy pilot officers receiving the coveted wings were representative of communities from Charlottetown to Vancouver and most of them came here from the elementary ground instructional school at the former Eglinton Hunt Club, Toronto.

Captain Cowley, addressing the graduates, reminded them they were the sixth and last class to come in as pilot officers for training. From now on, all pupil pilots will come into the service as aircraftmen under the joint air training plan, formerly known as the Commonwealth Air Training Plan.

"We knew you would be the last class, and so you were hand-picked," Captain Cowley said. "You are our choice, and anything you do will reflect to the credit or otherwise of the Royal Canadian Air Force."

Air Vice-Marshal Absent.

Air Vice-Marshal L. S. Breadner, D.S.C., had hoped to attend the wings parade, but could not come from Ottawa because of pressing duties.

Those receiving their wings were: Pilot Officers D. A. Weir, Montreal; P. W. Langford, Field, B.C.; W. B. Wood, Toronto; H. C. Stewart, Calgary; C. L. T. Sawle, Edmonton; F. W. Macdonell, Halifax; G. A. Tambling, London; R. J. W. Askwith, Ottawa; E. L. Neal, Cornwall; E. D. Porter, Belleville; J. H. Ross, Edmonton; W. D. W. Hilton, St. Catharines; R. H. Hyndman, Ottawa; R. M. Stayner, Saskatoon; J. R. Bryan, Port Arthur; J. S. Cardell, Edmonton; H. C. Trainor, Charlottetown; D. C. S. Macdonald, Vancouver; G.

R. M. Hunt, Edmonton; D. I. French, Edmonton; R. P. Quigley, Bartonville; J. G. Weir, Toronto; C. Chetwynd, Vancouver; R. A. McLernon, Montreal; J. W. Weis, Oakville; W. G. M. Hume, Sherbrooke; H. E. Mitchell, Brampton; E. W. R. Fortt, Esquimalt; E. A. Bland, Peterborough; D. G. C. Chown, Winnipeg; N. C. Brown, Saint John; R. J. Richards, Montreal; A. G. Byers, Montreal; H. E. King, Weyburn; L. Savard, Quebec; G. W. Scully, Ottawa; J. V. S. L. Saint-Pierre, Montreal; W. F. Napier, Fredericton; P. J. Phelan, Toronto; E. B. Gale, Quebec; and C. J. Fallis, Toronto.

Silence Observed.

The parade was called to attention and a short silence was observed when the name of M. L. Stephen of Moncton, N.B., was called. This member of the class died in an airplane crash last Monday after having qualified to receive his wings.

The wings ceremony took place in a hollow square formed by comrade units of airmen on three sides, and more than 2,000 relatives and friends on the other. The event was held on the tarmac in front of the control tower.

Among distinguished guests present were Wing Commander W. I. Riddell, Officer Commanding Rockliffe Air Station, Ottawa; Wing Commander F. S. McGill, O.C. of the new No. 2 Service Flying Training School at Uplands, Ottawa; and Squadron Leader J. G. Kerr of No. 2 F.S.T.S., Ottawa.

Advanced Training started immediately. It involved an additional 83 hours of flying time, Link training, air firing, bombing and navigation etc. Richard passed and placed 19th in his class of 40. On 10 October 1940, he was assessed as "average", and was recommended for a Commission and recommended for Flying Instructor.

On 7 October 1940, he reported to Station Trenton for the Flying Instructors Course. Flying the Harvard, his flying instructor noted, "This pupil has possibilities of becoming a capable instructor with more practice. General flying fair. Aerobatics average. To be watched and checked occasionally. Tendency to become careless."

The examining officer notes: "Explanation of majority of sequences not very convincing. More practice required on this type, particularly instrument flying." He finished the course with a "C" category.

Flying Instructor

From Trenton, Richard was posted to No. 3 Service Training Flying School (SFTS) in Calgary, Alberta. On 25 November 1940 he sent a telegraph to No. 3 SFTS:

**POSTED TO SFTS CALGARY REPORTING DECEMBER 2ND HOME IN
OTTAWA STOP DO YOU APPROVE TEN DAYS LEAVE NO LEAVE SINCE MAY**

**F/O ASKWITH RJ
BELLEVILLE ONT."**

No. 3 SFTS replied 29 November:

"LEAVE NOT GRANTED STOP REPORT AT ONCE

**CO
NO 3 SFTS
CALGARY AB**

C.P.R. COLLECT"

Richard drew up a will in Ottawa on the same day he received the telegram from his new CO and reported to Calgary on 2 December 1940.



Figure 5 No 3 SFTS

Source: Bomber Command Museum of Canada

He spent the period of 11 -16 December 1940 in the Station Hospital with a bout of bronchitis. This un auspicious start was followed by a memo from the Wing Commander to Askwith's CO regarding a nine-month-old debt owed by Richard to a Toronto based tailor. Payment was dispatched.

1941 - Hitler invades Russia; Japan attacks Pearl Harbour; United States enters the war; and "The Blitz" in the UK.

Richard was finally granted fourteen days leave starting 15 February 1941. He spent his holiday in Banff, Alberta staying at the Mount Royal Hotel.

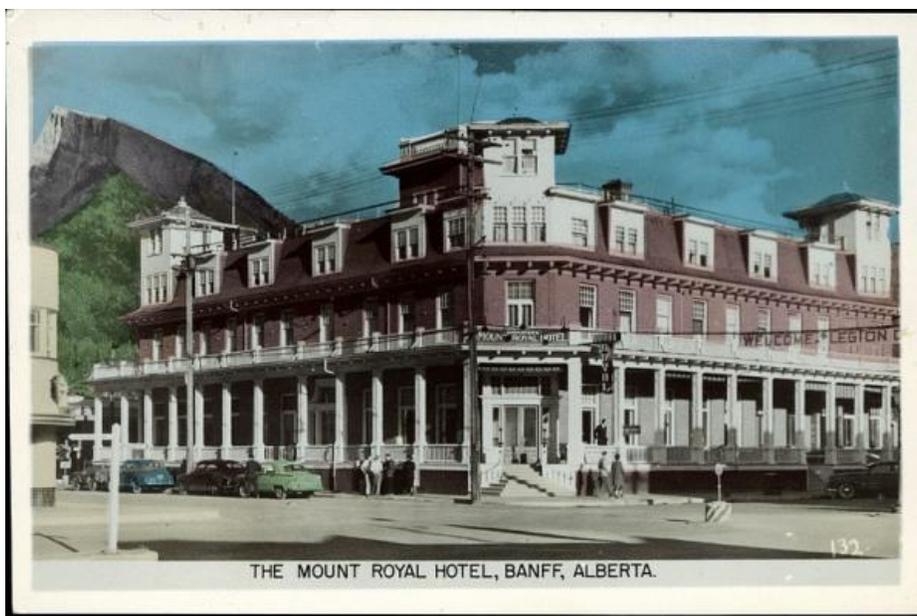


Figure 6 Mount Royal Hotel, Banff, Alberta

Source: University of Alberta Libraries

On 9 April 1941, he was recategorized as a Flying Instructor to category B. He was “very good” or “above average” and was rated “high average” in his ability as a pilot on his assessment. Of note, the comment next to “Manner” was “interesting”.

It was about this time that Toronto Adjusters contacted the Director of Air Personnel Services in Ottawa wanting information on the whereabouts of R.J. Askwith, RCAF. On 7 May 1941, the CO of No 3 SFTS received a letter from the Toronto Adjusters with a copy of a Warrant for re-possession of a 1937 Convertible Chevrolet Coupe purchased by F/O R.J. Askwith in September of 1940. The company claimed there was a balance owing of \$108.05 and furthermore it was “contrary to the conditional sales contract to move goods without informing the Finance Company, and not making payments.” It was an issue that would not be easily resolved.



Figure 7 1937 Chevrolet Convertible Coupe

Source: carnut.com

In May 1941, Richard filled out an obligatory Occupational History Form. Section G asked him to state employment preference or ambition, he answered “remain in RCAF or commercial flying”.

A Short Confidential Report from 3 SFTS dated 6 June 1941 in Calgary remarked: “2nd in command of a Flight. An average instructor. Inclined to be easy going and requires to develop more initiative. Has a good appearance, clean cut, and good personality. Should develop with more experience.”

Annual leave was spent at home in Ottawa, followed a posting to 14 Service Flying Training School in Aylmer, Ontario on 3 July 1941. This was the day that 14 SFTS was opened under the British Commonwealth Air Training Program.



Figure 8 Remains of No 14 SFTS Aylmer, Ontario

Now home of the Ontario Police College, part of the runway is now a wetland wildlife refuge (lower right of the photo). Source: Google Earth

The correspondence between Askwith and Toronto Adjusters continued until 7 July 1941 when he sent a lengthy letter containing list of complaints regarding the entire transaction. "I do not intend to pay the unnecessary expenses which have occurred in connection with this matter.....This car never was removed from Ontario by me at any time.....The sum of \$11.55 paid for the Bailliff who was apparently advised that my car was in Calgary is also unnecessary and useless as is the sum of \$7.75 paid to the Sheriff in that city. These expenses could have all been avoided if before any steps had been taken and letter had been written to me asking where the car was located." Enclosed with the letter was a cheque for \$80.00. Case closed.

On 13 July, a training accident occurred at 14 SFTS Aylmer involving a Harvard on a training flight. It was engaged in "instructing precautionary landing on Aerodrome....aircraft stalled, too high right wing, dropped and struck runway." The cause of the accident was deemed "poor judgement on the part of instructor. Aircraft levelled off too high." The instructor/pilot was F/O Askwith. There were no injuries. On 29 August, 7 days leave was granted and was spent at home in Ottawa.



Figure 9 Runway at No 14 SFTS Aylmer, present day

Source: Author's collection



Figure 10 Top end of runway at No 14 SFTS Aylmer, present day

Corn in the back and nature closing in on the left. Source: Author's collection.



Figure 11 One surviving hangar (modernized), No 14 SFTS Aylmer
Present day. Source: Author's collection.



Figure 12 Original wind tee from SFTS Aylmer, located on the grounds of the
Ontario Police College

Source: Author's Collection

Training continued in Aylmer and on 10 October 1941, another accident with a Harvard occurred. It was engaged in “dual take off circuits and landings....A/C ground looped on landing starboard wing.” Cause: “Pilot failed to correct swing on landing.” Instructor/pilot: R.J. Askwith. There were no injuries. This was the same Harvard Mk II serial 3207 that had been involved in the July incident.



Figure 13 North American Harvard

Source: CF Photo

On 15 December 1941, his Short Confidential Report noted: “This Officer is the most senior flying officer instructor in No. 1 Squadron. Could handle a flight capably if a vacancy existed. Is keen to be posted overseas. Recommended for posting overseas.”

Two days later, on 17 December, Richard was admitted to hospital with acute appendicitis, and he underwent an appendectomy the same day. Following his discharge from hospital, he was sent home to Ottawa with seven days sick leave.

On 11 February 1942, F/O Askwith was struck off strength No. 14 SFTS in Aylmer and taken on strength at 1 “Y” Depot, Halifax, to RAF Trainees Pool for an overseas posting.

1942 - Setbacks for the German army at Stalingrad and El Alamein; Japan takes Singapore; American victory in Battle of Midway in the Pacific; and mass murder at Auschwitz commences.



Figure 14 R.J.W. Askwith

Photograph taken while visiting relatives just prior to to embarkation. Source: Author's collection.

Overseas Service

He was taken on strength at No. 3 Personnel Receiving Centre (Bournemouth, England). His embarkation date on file was 18 February 1942 and shows that he disembarked in the UK on 6 March. Records show convoy HX-176 departed Halifax for Liverpool on 19 February 1942, arriving 6 March 1942 at Liverpool.ⁱ

On 24 March, Richard was sent to 51 Operational Training Unit (OTU). 51 OTU operated out of RAF Cranfield with a satellite at Twinwood Farm. Their specialty was training nightfighters, primarily using Blenheims.

“Micheal Bowyer recounts the somewhat bizarre and, perhaps apocryphal story, of contemporary night fighter training methods, which involved scores of air crew equipped with dark glasses being forced to ride around the barracks square on 'stop me and buy-one' Walls ice cream tricycles. (There was of course a war on!)”ⁱⁱ



Figure 15 Cranfield Airfield, present day

Source: Google Earth



Figure 16 Twinwood Farm site, present day

Outlines of original runways/taxiways can still be seen.

Source: Google Earth

Twinwood is known for the Glenn Miller story. It was from Twinwood Farm Airfield that he departed from on 14 December 1944, and the aircraft disappeared over the English Channel. No trace has ever been found.

The Flying Log of Pilot Officer Norman W. Mapes shows that Richard flew as pilot with Mapes as navigator on a local daylight training run lasting 1.5 hours on 25 April 1942. This was followed by two additional runs on 26 April; one local daylight run of 40 minutes, and one local and cross country night run lasting just over 2.5 hours. All flights were on Boston MK III aircraft.



Figure 17 Boston III, W8268 TH "O" for Ottawa, Ontario

Although on RAF strength, aircraft was operated by RCAF 418 (Intruder) Sqn.
Source: pprune.org

On 27 April 1942, Richard was taken on strength at 418 Squadron. The squadron was formed in November 1941 as part of No. 11 Group, Fighter Command. It was tasked to patrol enemy airfields and dispense of the enemy as he launched operations against the Allies and generally disrupt enemy operations. It first saw action on 27 March 1942 in a bombing run to Belgium. The following evening, it took on the true role of "intruder" by launching patrols to various airfields such as Lille, France and Gilze-Rijen, Holland.

"Since the intruder squadrons are among the most hushhush units of the R.A.F., their offensive success and the lives of their personnel depending upon absolute secrecy as to location, route of ingress to occupied countries and other details which are of much less concern to a bomber or day fighter squadron, their work

may be discussed only in general terms. However, it is permissible to say that since the inception of the squadron the R.C.A.F. intruders have repeatedly bombed runways, flare paths and hangars and started many fires. In addition to causing material damage, they have effected considerable dislocation of the Luftwaffe's night flying operations. One particularly successful attack was made on Schipol aerodrome in the Netherlands, when bombs started a fire which a few moments later caused a terrific detonation as if an ammunition dump had been exploded. Though their activities are directed primarily against ground targets, R.C.A.F. intruders have had numerous encounters with enemy aircraft and in the short period from the formation of the squadron to the end of August 1942 had destroyed at least two enemy machines and inflicted damage on many more. In the ensuing year they continued to develop this side of their activities."ⁱⁱⁱ

Mapes had joined the RCAF in August of 1940 and had been with 418 Squadron since early December of 1941. Based on his Flying Log, it appears that he and Askwith had only one night training flight with the Boston.

The same day that Richard was taken on strength at 418 Squadron, he was given his first mission - an Intruder operation to Gilze along with navigator Norman Mapes. Rounding out the crew as air gunner was Flight Sgt Gordon James Hardy of Sherbrooke, Quebec, who had joined the RCAF in November of 1940. Hardy had been in England since early September, 1941.

The objective, Gilze-Rijen, was an airbase located near Breda, Holland. It was expanded by the Germans in 1940 and built into one of the largest airfields in Europe. It was used to launch interceptors against allied aircraft who were enroute to bomb Germany and it had heavy FLAK defences.

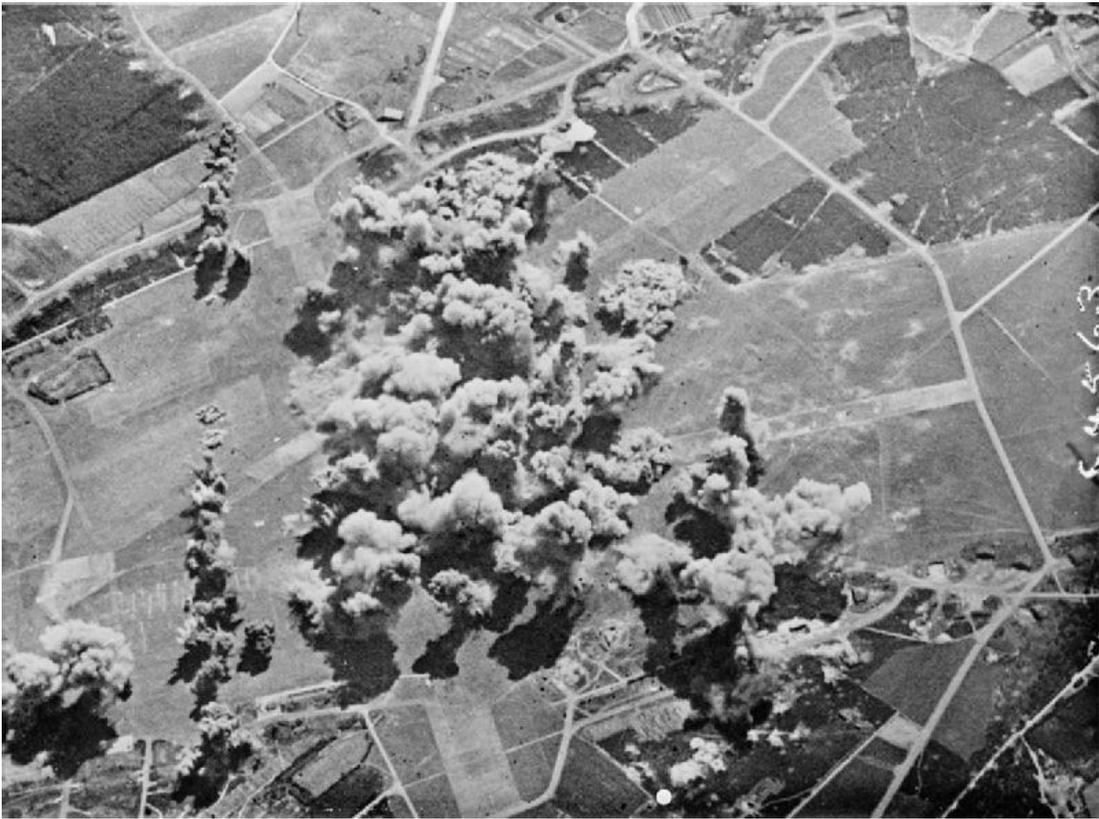


Figure 18 Gilze-Rijen Airfield

Still from a film taken from an aircraft of Bomber Command, showing a carpet of bombs exploding on the airfield of Gilze-Rijen
Source: © IWM (C 4563)



Figure 19 Douglas Boston MK III, September 1942 at Bradwell Bay

Source: © IWM (CH 7210)



Figure 20 Boston Mark III, (Intruder) W8358 "TH-R", of No. 418 Squadron RCAF flying off the French coast while heading back to its base at Bradwell Bay, Essex, after a night sortie over Europe. W8358 was eventually lost while on another night intruder sortie to Creil, France, on 8 November 1942. Source: © IWM (CH 7215)



Figure 21 Boston Mark III (Intruder), Z2165 "TH-X", of No 418 Squadron RCAF based at Bradwell Bay, Essex, in flight. Source: © IWM (CH 7213)

Boston MK III Z2240, TH-T took off from Bradwell Bay at 0008 on 28 April 1942 and did not return. The Squadron Log notes:

C1611 Flying Officer R.J. Askwith (Pilot) R.C.A.F., J-7521 Pilot Officer N.W. Mapes (Observer) RCAF, R77323 Sergeant C.J. Hardy, (Air Gunner) R.C.A.F. in Boston III NO. Z2240 failed to return from Night Operations over enemy occupied territory.

Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and No.	Pilot	Duty	REMARKS (including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)	Flying Times	
						Day	Night
					Time carried forward:—	157:55	
16-4-42	1800	MAJESTER 8076	Sgt. HINXMAN	PASSENGER	BRADWELL - HALTON	:35	
18-4-42	:	BOSTON III "P"	P/O PERSIAN	NAVIGATOR	N. F. T.	:55	
19-4-42	:	BOSTON III "P"	P/O PERSIAN	NAVIGATOR	N. F. T.	45	
22-4-42	?	BOSTON III "Z"	P/O PERSIAN	NAVIGATOR	N. F. T.	30	
22-4-42	?	BOSTON III "Z"	P/O PERSIAN	NAVIGATOR	N. F. T.	:15	
23-4-42	?	BOSTON III "B"	P/O PERSIAN	NAVIGATOR	BASE-DEBDEN-HALTON - RETURN	1:45	
25-4-42		BOSTON III "G"	F/O ASKWITH	NAVIGATOR	LOCAL	1:50	
26-4-42		BOSTON III "W"	F/O ASKWITH	NAVIGATOR	LOCAL	:40	
26-4-42		BOSTON III "W"	F/O ASKWITH	NAVIGATOR	LOCAL & X COUNTRY		2:55
27-4-42		BOSTON III "W"	F/O ASKWITH	NAVIGATOR	INTRUDER GILZE		NOT YET RETURNED

Figure 22 Last Page of the Log Book of P/O Mapes

Source: Bob Mapes



Figure 23 Photo of Bradwell Bay Airfield (late war)

Source: Airfield Information Exchange

On 28 April 1942, a cable was dispatched to Richard's father, John Askwith, informing him that his son was missing after air operations over enemy occupied territory. His brother, Gordon, serving with the Army Pay Corps in England, was also notified. Similar cables were sent to the next of kin for Sgt Hardy and P/O Mapes.

On 9 May, a letter was sent to Richard's father from the RCAF Casualties Officer, detailing the operation he was on when he went missing and the names of his crew, as well as the names and addresses of their next of kin. It was suggested that he may have been a prisoner of war and that inquiries were being made with the International Red Cross and other appropriate sources.

On 15 June, another letter was sent: "It has since been learned through the International Red Cross Committee that Pilot Officer Mapes, the air-observer of your son's aircraft, is a prisoner of war, but unfortunately no details are known concerning any of the remaining members of the crew."

Royal Canadian Air Force

KILLED IN ACTION.—Sgt. J. J. Davenport; Flt. Sgt. B. W. Forman; Sgt. W. J. Marshall; Sgt. W. I. Meech.

PREVIOUSLY REPORTED MISSING, NOW PRESUMED KILLED IN ACTION.—Sgt. G. L. Chapman; P/O J. R. E. Denkman; P/O C. T. Lane; Sgt. C. J. F. McCrum; Sgt. S. J. Maclean; Sgt. G. F. Macleod; Flt. Sgt. W. C. Mackenzie; Sgt. D. C. Marshall; Sgt. D. S. Mather; Sgt. S. I. C. Moulds; Sgt. E. J. Mutton; Sgt. F. Peever; Flt. Sgt. R. G. Postans; Sgt. A. R. Powell; P/O J. G. Rogers; Sgt. J. G. Smith; Sgt. H. F. Stentford; Sgt. S. G. Westbrooke.

MISSING, BELIEVED KILLED IN ACTION.—Sgt. J. R. Dow; Sgt. G. M. Robertson.

MISSING—F/O R. J. W. Askwith; Flt. Sgt. F. C. Austin; Sgt. G. J. Hardy; Sgt. G. M. Lantz; Flt. Sgt. G. J. Wilkie.

Figure 24 Extract from Flight Global, July 1942

Sherbrooke Flier Killed In Action

Mr. and Mrs. James Hardy, 1 Maple street, have received official word from the Royal Canadian Air Force headquarters that their son, Sgt. Air Gunner Gordon Hardy, who was reported missing following air operations over enemy territory on April 28, was killed in action at that time.

Gordon Hardy, 24 years of age, was born in Sherbrooke and attended the Sherbrooke High School where he was one of the most popular young students. Upon leaving school, he worked for some time at Zeller's in Sherbrooke and later went to Montreal where he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in August, 1940. He trained at Winnipeg and other R.C.A.F. stations and proceeded overseas as an sergeant air gunner in August, 1941.

Shortly before his death through enemy action, he had been promoted to a flight sergeant, but was killed before the time required for confirmation of his appointment had elapsed.

Figure 25 Extract from Coaticook Observer, 11 July 1942

No other word of Richard's fate arrived until 6 August. An RCAF message was sent to Mr. Askwith.

REGRET TO INFORM YOU ADVICE RECEIVED FROM THE ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE CASUALTIES OFFICER OVERSEAS QUOTING GERMAN INFORMATION RECEIVED THROUGH THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS SOCIETY THAT YOUR SON FLYING OFFICER RICHARD JOHN WATTS ASKWITH C ONE SIX ONE ONE LOST HIS LIFE BUT DOES NOT CONTAIN ANY FURTHER PARTICULARS (.) PENDING FURTHER CONFIRMATION YOUR SON IS TO BE CONSIDERED MISSING BELIEVED KILLED (.) PLEASE ACCEPT MY SINCERE SYMPATHY IN YOUR GREAT ANXIETY (.) LETTER FOLLOWS

This correspondence was followed by news from RCAF Headquarters that the telegrams from the International Red Cross (and quoted from official German

reports) stated that Pilot Officer Mapes was “captured on that day and that your son and the other occupant of his aircraft are dead”.

In the days and weeks that followed, more condolences were sent to Mr. Askwith from various officials. In the meantime, he began the task of settling his son’s estate. Included on the list of Assets: “1 Standard Motor Car A.A.D. 177 - At Pembroke”.

In September 1942, Mr. Askwith requested that his son’s cap and wings be returned to him but that his greatcoat, raincoat and uniforms be donated to The Officers’ Kit Replacement Bureau.

On 17 October, an RCAF Casualties Officer wrote, “Further to my letter of August 13th, advice has been received from the Royal Canadian Air Force Casualties Officer, Overseas, quoting from German information, which states your son, Flying Officer Richard John Watts Askwith was buried in the Military Cemetery, Breda, fifteen miles south of Dordrecht, Holland. Presumption of Death Action is being instituted by the Air Ministry and when death is officially presumed you will be informed immediately.”

On 18 November 1942, Certificate of Presumption of Death number 1493 was issued for C1611 Flying Officer Richard John Watts Askwith.



F.O. Richard Askwith.

J. "Dick" Askwith Presumed Dead After Air Attack

Reported missing on April 28 after having taken part in several air attacks on enemy territory during the short time he had been in Britain, Flying-Officer Richard J. W. "Dick" Askwith, son of John

F. Askwith of 24 Alexander street, and the late Mrs. Askwith, is now presumed dead, according to a casualty list issued by R.C.A.F. headquarters last night.

It was the 423rd air casualty list of the war and reported seven men killed on active service overseas, three missing and believed killed during air operations overseas and one missing on active service in Newfoundland. Eight airmen, previously reported missing overseas were listed as now, for official purposes, presumed dead.

"Dick" Askwith, who was 22 years of age, was one of two sons of Mr. Askwith, serving with the armed forces, as he has a brother, Sergeant Gordon Askwith, who has been stationed in Britain for nearly three years, serving with the army Pay Corps.

After graduating from Lisgar Collegiate, he was employed by the General Electric Company for some time before enlisting in the air force in January of 1940. Receiving his flying training at Fort William and Toronto, he graduated at Camp Borden and for some time acted as an instructor at Calgary and Aylmer before going overseas in February of this year.

Figure 26 Extract from the Ottawa Citizen, 17 November 1942

On 13 June 1943, a trunk, suitcase, bag and parcel were delivered to the home of Mr. Askwith. They contained the personal effects of his son including the books *The Sun Was My Undoing* and *The Oxford Book of English Verse* along with a leather case containing one gold locket.

In 1946, Mr. Askwith received the Operational Wings and Certificate for his son from the RCAF Records Branch. In early 1947 he received his log book.

In July of 1947, a letter was sent from the Casualty Officer notifying Mr. Askwith that his son, who had previously been buried at Breda, had been re-interred at Bergen-op-Zoom British Military Cemetery, which would be turned over to the Imperial War Graves Commission.

Following the issue of medals and a Memorial Bar in 1949, there was no other official correspondence between Mr. Askwith and the authorities.

Richard's brother, Gordon, survived the war, married and had a family. His father, John Askwith died in 1969, and it is not known whether he visited Bergen-op-Zoom.

Aftermath

The story of Richard John Watts Askwith, Gordon James Hardy, Norman Mapes and Boston MK III Z2240 "TH-T" would gather dust for sixty-six years. In February of 2008, a relative of Askwith's ran an ad in the Lost Trails section of the Legion magazine asking for information on N.W. Mapes of 418 Squadron, who survived the crash.

He was contacted by a niece of Mapes and, following that initial contact, by Norman Mapes' son. Archival documents from 1942 and Bob Mapes' knowledge of his father's wartime service helped to complete the story of Boston Z2240.

Bob Mapes has a letter from Mapes to a colleague written on 22 May 1942, from German occupied territory:

"There is little to be said of the matter which detains me here: We were intercepted; turned in to attack; curtains. Somehow I was thrown through the Perspex, don't know how as I must have been unconscious for several seconds. Came to floating downward with the craft attached to it by the earphone cord. I believe, am not sure; was too near "black out" to realise much. Tried to detach myself, pulled rip cord, curtains again.

When I "came to" the plane had crashed and was burning. I was hanging in an almost horizontal position from my chute. Shoulders apparently slipped out of the straps. Righted myself, landed first on feet then on face, blacked both eyes and "bit the dirt."

Slipped the chute, but when I finally came to rest I realised I was in terrific pain. I tried to rise I wanted to get back to the plane to help the others but I could scarcely move.

Gradually it occurred to me that the boys were beyond any earthly aid so I planned to escape. Again I tried to rise, no success. I rolled over on my stomach and from that position I could raise all but my head, it simply would not move. The pain in my back & neck were terrific. Concluded I'd fractured my spinal column or neck and that it was only a matter of twisting into the right position to place pressure on the spinal cord then all would be over. Desperately I tried to reach that position as the pain was beyond endurance, however no luck.

I must have "passed out" or slept for a few minutes for when I next remember the fire from the plane had almost died out. Dawn was approaching so I made another desperate attempt to get up and away before it was too late. I managed, by lifting my head with my right hand (my left was useless for some reason), to struggle to my feet. I took a couple of steps, wavered and crashed. When "daylight returned to me" the sun was peeping over the hills.

I struggled to my feet and by practically carrying my head I managed to navigate at least part of the distance to a farm house possibly a quarter mile away. The last part of the distance I recall being half dragged, half carried by a man. I was placed in the barn on a pile of hay and made as comfortable as possible. Later he arrived with a most welcome drink of tea (or some such thing) and informed me he had sent for the doctor: In due course the doctor, and with him military police, arrived to transport me to the hospital.

Some eleven x-ray pictures were taken over a period of a week, and the pains eased slightly with the passing of time. After eighteen days in bed I was permitted to be up for a few minutes, now am on my pins doing fairly well. Neck & shoulders are still rather stiff and sore in spots, however I reckon I'll live.

Don't know when I'll be transferred to a prison camp, but expect it will not be long."

Bob Mapes recalls his father telling him:

"It was cloudy all the way over the channel. When they came out of the clouds over Holland it must have been a moonlight night*. Dad said he could see boats on the canals from 10,000 ft. This sight seeing didn't last for long. Almost instantly dad saw a night fighter and intercommed the pilot. Next thing the plane was shuddering either from a stall or the pilot firing the guns (they would have been on both sides of Dad in the nose.) The next thing he remembers is trying to get away from the plane (it was a common experience for aircrew to be attached to the aircraft by their intercom cable) then pulling his ripcord (sit pack). Dad's theory was that whatever force threw him out of the aircraft must of also thrown the gunner out. Unfortunately, to operate the guns his pack had to be stored on the wall. The pilot being in the center of gravity went down with the plane. Dad always thought that the fighter seemed to be waiting for them."

* Historical records show there was an 87% full moon that evening.



Figure 27 Boston MK III Z2240 "TH-T"

Source: "En Nooit Was Het Stil..."

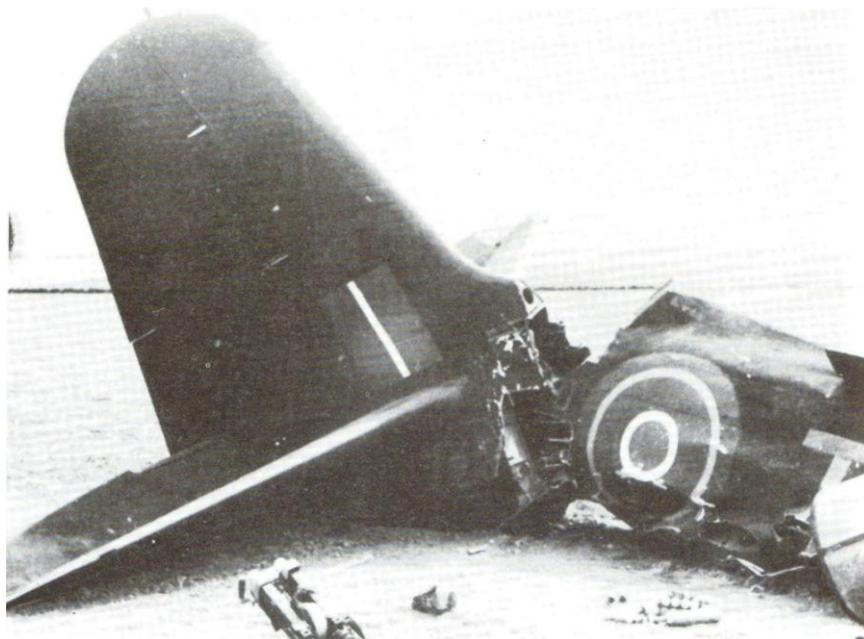


Figure 28 Boston MK III Z2240 "TH-T"

Source: "En Nooit Was Het Stil..."



Figure 29 Norman Mapes - middle row, 3rd from left

Norman Mapes - middle row, 3rd from left. Source: Bob Mapes

Norman Mapes spent the rest of the war, three hundred and one days, as a prisoner of war until the liberation. The injuries he sustained in the crash of Z2240 would affect him for the rest of his life, particularly the fracture to his neck.

In the 1950's he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease. In 1955 he travelled to Europe with family, fell ill and was hospitalized in London where he received treatment for his cancer. On this trip he returned to Holland and visited his crewmates at Bergen op Zoom. He told his son Bob that he had two Remembrance days every year; one on 11 November and the other on 28 April. He died in 1991.

Air Marshal L.S. Breadner, CB DSC, Air Officer Commander-in Chief, RCAF Overseas, speaking about 418 Squadron, noted that "The record blazed across the skies of Europe by the gallant members of 418 (The City of Edmonton) Squadron, is outstanding in the annals of warfare. No group of young Canadians engaged in the hazardous business of facing a desperate foe displayed more courage, more of the press on spirit, than did these men, who typified young Canada."



Figure 30 Graves of G.J. Hardy and R.J.W. Askwith, Bergen op Zoom, Netherlands

Source: Authors collection

In Memory of Richard John Watts Askwith and Gordon James Hardy, and with thanks to Norman Wilson Mapes for his service.

We will remember them.

Appendix 1 Map of Objective and Crash Area



Appendix 2 Map of Airfields in England



Appendix 3 Photographs of Bradwell Bay Memorial



Photo Credit: Paul Brennan



Photo Credit: Paul Brennan

P/O	M.G.	ABEYM		RCAF
Sgt.	A.J.	ADAMS		RAF
F/O	J.	AFFLECK		RAF
F/S	M.G.	ALDWORTH		RAF
F/S	J.	ANDERSON		RNZAF
F/O	R.J.	ASKWITH		RAF
F/L	E.C.	BALL	DFC	RNZAF
F/L	J.R.	BECKETT		RAAF
F/S	E.H.	BEHRENT		RNZAF
S/L	J.	BERRY	DFC	2 BARS RAF
F/O	A.H.G.	BIGGS		RAF
P/O	R.G.	BLAMIRES		RCAF
Sgt.	R.J.	BLENKARN		RCAF
F/L	G.L.	BONHAM	DFC	RAF
Sgt.	F.	BRADLEY		RCAF
Sgt.	G.E.	FALLIS		RCAF

Photo Credit: Paul Brennan

F/L	J.A.	GUNN		RNZAF
Sgt.	G.W.G.	HARDING		RAF
Sgt.	G.J.	HARDY		RCAF
F/S	G.N.	HAYES		RAF
F/O	L.V.	HAYES		RAF
F/O	O.L.R.	HILLS		RAF
S/L	D.O.	HOBBS	DFC	RAF
F/O	H.G.	HOLTROP		RAF
F/O	A.D.	HONE		RCAF
W/C	B.	HOWARD		RAAF
P/O	J.W.	HUTCHINSON		RCAF
Sgt.	D.S.	HUTT		RCAF
F/O	G.O.G.	HYNE		RAF
W/O		HYMAS		RAF
Sgt.	R.V.	IEVERS		RAF
F/O	P.J.	LEBOLDUS		RCAF

Photo Credit: Paul Brennan

ⁱ convoyweb.org.uk

ⁱⁱ Cranfield University <http://www.cranfield.ac.uk/>

ⁱⁱⁱ The RCAF Overseas, Volume I: The First Four Years, Oxford University Press, 1944